International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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Human Rights Committee

Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Lebanon*

1. The Committee considered the third periodic report of Lebanon (CCPR/C/LBN/3) at its 3460th and 3470th meetings (see CCPR/C/SR.3460 and 3470), held on 15 and 22 March 2018. At its 3482nd meeting, held on 3 April 2018, it adopted the present concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the third periodic report of Lebanon, albeit over 15 years late, and the information presented therein. It expresses appreciation for the opportunity to renew, after more than 20 years, its constructive dialogue with the State party's delegation on the measures taken during the reporting period to implement the provisions of the Covenant. The Committee is grateful to the State party for its written replies (CCPR/C/LBN/Q/3/Add.1/Rev.1) to the list of issues (CCPR/C/LBN/Q/3), which were supplemented by the oral responses provided by the delegation, and for the supplementary information provided to it in writing.

B. Positive aspects

3. The Committee welcomes the following legislative and policy measures taken by the State party:

(a) The adoption of the National Human Rights Action Plan 2014–2019;

(b) The establishment of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Women's Affairs;

(c) The adoption of Act No. 28 on access to information, on 10 February 2017.

4. The Committee welcomes the State party's ratification of, or accession to, the following international instruments:

(a) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on 16 April 1997;

(b) The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, on 5 October 2000 and 22 December 2008, respectively;

(c) The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, on 8 November 2004.

* Adopted by the Committee at its 122nd session (12 March–6 April 2018).

C. Principal matters of concern and recommendations

Domestic implementation of the Covenant

5. The Committee notes that the Covenant is an integral part of the domestic legal system, with the status of "constitutional value", and that, pursuant to article 2 of the Code of Civil Procedure, it has primacy over the provisions of ordinary law but not over the Constitution. The Committee regrets the absence of specific information, as requested in its previous recommendations (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 30), on the application of the provisions of the Covenant by domestic courts and on how potential conflicts between domestic statutes and Covenant guarantees have been resolved (art. 2).

6. **The State party should give full effect to the Covenant in its domestic legal order and ensure that domestic laws are interpreted and applied in conformity with its obligations under the Covenant. It should also make further efforts to raise awareness about the Covenant among judges, lawyers, prosecutors and public officials. The Committee also reiterates its recommendation (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 29) that the State party give consideration to ratifying, or acceding to, the first Optional Protocol to the Covenant.**

National human rights institutions

7. While welcoming the adoption of Act No. 62 of 27 October 2016 establishing the National Human Rights Commission, the Committee regrets the delay in the appointment of its members and in the allocation of a budget (art. 2).

8. **The State party should expedite the appointment of the members of the National Human Rights Commission, which oversees the Committee for the Protection from Torture (the national preventive mechanism), and ensure that both institutions are provided with the human and financial resources necessary to guarantee their autonomy and independence in line with the principles relating to the promotion and protection of national human rights institutions (the Paris Principles) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, respectively, and to enable them to carry out their mandates effectively.**

State of emergency

9. The Committee remains concerned (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 10) that the circumstances under which a state of emergency may be proclaimed and enforced under Legislative Decree No. 102 of 1983 are excessively broad and may authorize, inter alia, non-compliance with non-derogable provisions of the Covenant (art. 4).

10. **The State party should bring its legislation governing states of emergency into compliance with the requirements of article 4 of the Covenant, as interpreted in the Committee's general comment No. 29 (2001) on derogations from provisions of the Covenant during a state of emergency, particularly with regard to non-derogable provisions of the Covenant and to limiting any derogations to those that are strictly required by the exigencies of the situation.**

Non-discrimination framework

11. While noting that the Constitution proclaims the principle of equality generally, the Committee regrets the lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation covering all the grounds prohibited under the Covenant. It is also concerned about the lack of effective remedies for victims of discrimination (arts. 2 and 26).

12. **The State party should take all the measures necessary to ensure that its legal framework: (a) provides full and effective protection against discrimination in all spheres, including the private sphere, and prohibits direct, indirect and multiple discrimination; (b) contains a comprehensive list of grounds for discrimination in line with the Covenant, including sexual orientation and gender identity; and (c) provides for access to effective and appropriate remedies for victims of discrimination.**

Discrimination and violence on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

13. The Committee is concerned that, despite the information about court judgments holding that article 534 of the Criminal Code is not applicable to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals, such individuals continue to be arrested and prosecuted, including for sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex, under article 534 of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes "any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature". It is also concerned about reports of the prevalence in society of discrimination, hate speech and homophobic attitudes; harassment, violence and extortion directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals; violations of their freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly; and the lack of protection against such acts (arts. 2, 7, 9, 14, 17, 19, 21 and 26).

14. **The State party should explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals are afforded, both in law and in practice, adequate and effective protection against all forms of discrimination, hate speech or violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and that such acts are properly investigated, prosecuted and, if the perpetrators are convicted, punished with appropriate penalties. It should decriminalize sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex with a view to bringing its legislation into compliance with the Covenant and take all measures necessary to guarantee in practice the effective enjoyment of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals.**

Personal status laws

15. The Committee remains concerned (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, paras. 18–19) that religion-based personal status laws discriminate against women in such matters as marriage, pecuniary rights, divorce, child custody and inheritance. It is also concerned about: (a) the limited oversight over religious courts dealing with personal status matters; (b) the different minimum legal age of marriage according to religious denomination and the difficulties in obtaining the registration and recognition of a civil marriage; and (c) the fact that the 1925 Nationality Act does not allow Lebanese women to pass on their nationality to their children and spouses. The Committee notes the two bills that would, respectively, protect minors from early marriage and allow women to pass on their nationality on an equal basis with men (arts. 2, 3, 17 and 18).

16. **The State party should repeal all discriminatory provisions against women in its legislation and consider adopting a unified personal status act that would apply to all persons, regardless of religious affiliation, and guarantee equality between men and women and respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It should also provide for the option of civil marriage and for the legal recognition of such marriages; set the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years; and amend the Nationality Act to ensure that women have equal rights with men in transmitting their nationality to their children and spouses.**

Gender equality

17. While welcoming the measures taken to promote gender equality, the Committee is concerned about the persistence of patriarchal stereotypes regarding the role of women and men in the family and in society. It is also concerned that, despite some progress in the representation of women in political and public life, particularly at local levels, women continue to remain underrepresented in legislative and executive bodies and in decision-making positions (arts. 2, 3, 25 and 26).

18. **The State party should strengthen measures to ensure gender equality and should develop strategies to combat patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society at large. The State party should step up its efforts to achieve the equitable representation of women in the public and political spheres, including in legislative and executive bodies,**

particularly in decision-making positions, if necessary through appropriate temporary special measures, to give effect to the provisions of the Covenant.

Violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence

19. While welcoming the repeal in August 2017 of article 522 of the Criminal Code that exempted a rapist from criminal liability if he married the victim, the Committee is concerned that articles 505 and 518 of the Criminal Code are still reportedly used to exempt rapists of minors between 15 and 18 years of age from prosecution or punishment when they have been promised for marriage to the rapist by her parents. The Committee is also concerned about: (a) the shortcomings of Act No. 293 of 2014 on the protection of women and other family members from domestic violence, including its restrictive definition of domestic violence; (b) the absence of provisions criminalizing marital rape and sexual harassment; (c) the lack of official statistics on violence against women, including domestic violence and rape; and (d) the limited investigation and prosecution of such cases. The Committee notes that amendments to Act No. 293 of 2014, as well as bills aimed at criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace and at reviewing articles 505 and 518 of the Criminal Code, are currently under discussion (arts. 2, 3, 7 and 26).

20. **The State party should:**

(a) **Ensure the criminalization of domestic violence, the explicit criminalization of marital rape and sexual harassment and the effective implementation of such legislation in practice;**

(b) **Amend articles 505 and 518 of the Criminal Code to ensure that perpetrators of rape incur criminal responsibility without exception and regardless of the age of the victim;**

(c) **Strengthen preventive measures, including awareness-raising campaigns to combat violence against women, systematically inform women of their rights and encourage the reporting of such violence to law enforcement authorities;**

(d) **Ensure that law enforcement officers, the judiciary and other relevant stakeholders receive appropriate training in how to detect and deal properly with cases of violence against women;**

(e) **Ensure that data on violence against women is collected and that all cases of violence against women are promptly and thoroughly investigated, that perpetrators are prosecuted and, if convicted, punished with appropriate sanctions and that victims have access to protection and to effective remedies.**

Death penalty

21. While welcoming the fact that the State party has not carried out any executions since 2004 and has not imposed any death sentence since 2014, and also welcoming the move towards a moratorium, the Committee is concerned that, under domestic legislation, the death penalty can be imposed for crimes that do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" within the meaning of article 6 (2) of the Covenant (art. 6).

22. **The State party should maintain the moratorium on executions and give due consideration to the legal abolition of the death penalty. Pending the abolition of the death penalty, the State party should undertake a comprehensive review of relevant legislation to ensure that the death penalty can be imposed only for the most serious crimes, that is, only for crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing. It should also consider ratifying or acceding to the Second Optional Protocol to the Covenant, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.**

Enforced disappearances

23. While welcoming the decree of 4 March 2014 of the State Consultative Council recognizing that relatives of disappeared and missing persons have the right to the truth, the Committee is concerned about: (a) thousands of unresolved cases of disappeared and missing persons during the civil war and the absence of any prosecutions for such acts; (b)

the absence of comprehensive legislation on disappeared and missing persons and of an independent national body mandated to search for such persons; and (c) amnesty legislation that does not explicitly exclude enforced disappearance from its scope of application. The Committee also regrets that the State party has not acted on Decree No. 618 of 8 August 2007 providing for the draft act on the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Committee notes that two bills on the issue of disappeared persons and their families and on the collection and storage of the DNA of families of disappeared persons are under discussion (arts. 2, 6, 7, 9 and 16).

24. **The State party should:**

(a) **Effectively criminalize enforced disappearance;**

(b) **Establish an independent national authority mandated to search for disappeared and missing persons, and a centralized registry of disappeared persons;**

(c) **Investigate all unresolved cases of disappeared persons in order to clarify their fate and whereabouts and ensure that the victims and their relatives are informed of the progress and results of the investigation; identify those responsible and ensure that they are prosecuted and punished with appropriate penalties that are commensurate with the gravity of their crimes; and ensure that victims of enforced disappearance and their families are provided with full reparation, including rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition;**

(d) **Ensure that the crime of enforced disappearance is outside the scope of any amnesty laws;**

(e) **Publicize the reports of the commissions of inquiry into disappeared and missing persons;**

(f) **Revitalize efforts aimed at completing the process of ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.**

Voluntary termination of pregnancy and reproductive health

25. The Committee is concerned that articles 539 to 546 of the Criminal Code criminalize abortion, except in the event of grave danger to the life of the woman. While noting the State party's assertion that judges may authorize abortion, on a case-by-case basis, the Committee is concerned about reports of women resorting to unsafe abortions, which put their lives and health at risk. The Committee is also concerned about the requirement of the approval of two medical specialists in addition to the consulting doctor or surgeon who might refuse to perform abortions for reason of conscience (arts. 3, 6, 7, 17 and 26).

26. **The State party should amend its legislation with a view to ensuring effective access to safe, legal abortion when the life or health of a pregnant woman or girl is endangered and when carrying a pregnancy to term would cause the woman or girl substantial pain or suffering, most notably when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest or when it is not viable. The State party should ensure that women and girls who have recourse to abortion and the doctors who attend to them are not subject to criminal penalties, and lift barriers, such as those related to multiple medical authorizations and conscientious objection, since the existence of such penalties and barriers compel women and girls to resort to unsafe abortions, which put their lives and health at risk. The State party should, furthermore, implement educational policies to raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health among women, men and adolescents and ensure access to appropriate and affordable contraception and reproductive health services.**

Torture and ill-treatment

27. The Committee is concerned that the new law on criminalizing torture, Act No. 65 of 26 October 2017, does not meet the requirements of article 7 of the Covenant, as it: (a) limits the definition of torture to situations of investigation, interrogation, judicial

investigation, trial and punishment; (b) fails to criminalize cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; (c) includes a statute of limitations for prosecuting torture; (d) prescribes penalties that do not reflect the gravity of the crime; and (e) does not provide for effective remedies and reparation (arts. 2 and 7).

28. **The State party should, as a matter of urgency, amend its criminal legislation with a view to bringing the definition of torture into conformity with article 7 of the Covenant and other internationally accepted standards. It should also ensure that the crime of torture is not subject to a statute of limitations, that penalties for torture are commensurate to the gravity of the crime and that victims have, in law and in practice, access to full reparation, including rehabilitation, adequate compensation and the possibility of seeking civil remedies independent of criminal proceedings.**

29. While noting the measures taken to prevent and combat torture, the Committee is concerned about allegations of torture and ill-treatment by security forces of persons deprived of their liberty, including prisoners in Roumieh prison in June 2015, that have reportedly led to death in some cases, and about the limited accountability for such acts (arts. 6, 7 and 10).

30. **The State party should take robust measures to eradicate torture and ill-treatment, inter alia by:**

(a) **Providing security forces and other law enforcement personnel with adequate training on torture prevention and humane treatment;**

(b) **Ensuring regular and effective monitoring and inspection of all places of deprivation of liberty by the Committee for the Protection from Torture;**

(c) **Ensuring that criminal proceedings can be initiated by the prosecutor ex officio whenever he or she receives information that torture has taken place;**

(d) **Ensuring that all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and deaths in custody are promptly and thoroughly investigated by an effective and fully independent mechanism, that perpetrators are prosecuted and, if convicted, are punished with sanctions consistent with the severity of the crime and that victims and, where appropriate, their families, are provided with full reparation, including rehabilitation and adequate compensation;**

(e) **Collecting data on cases of torture and ill-treatment, and the prosecutions and convictions secured, and making such information public.**

Liberty and security of persons

31. The Committee is concerned about reports of: (a) arbitrary and extrajudicial arrest and detention by security forces, including incommunicado detention, with no access to a lawyer; (b) frequent violation of the 48-hour legal time frame within which a person suspected of an offence is brought before a judge and exceptions to the 48-hour rule provided for under article 108 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in cases of crimes against State security and other serious crimes; (c) the large number of prisoners held in pretrial detention and prolonged pretrial detention without access to counsel; and (d) pretrial detention of children, especially in cases of crimes committed together with adults. It is also concerned that a defence counsel is not entitled to attend the interrogation of his or her client during the preliminary investigation (arts. 9 and 14).

32. **The State party should bring its legislation and practices into compliance with article 9 of the Covenant, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 35 (2014) on liberty and security of person. It should, inter alia:**

(a) **Ensure that the existing maximum period of detention before appearance before a judge and the statutory limits on pretrial detention are strictly adhered to in practice and that pretrial detention of juveniles is avoided to the fullest extent possible;**

(b) **Increase the use of non-custodial alternative measures to pretrial detention in practice;**

(c) **Ensure that all persons deprived of their liberty have, in practice, prompt access to a lawyer from the very outset of their detention.**

Right to privacy and surveillance

33. The Committee is concerned about reports of arbitrary interference with the privacy of individuals, including allegations of mass surveillance of digital communications; allegations of direct authorizations by the Prime Minister of the interception of private communications and access to data without the prior judicial authorization required by law; and the granting of full telecommunications data access to security agencies, following the relinquishment of the authority of the Council of Ministers to approve or deny such requests. The Committee is also concerned about the insufficient protection of biometric data under the current legal framework and notes that a bill on this issue was submitted to the Standing Committee of the Parliament (arts. 2 and 17).

34. **The State party should ensure that all laws governing surveillance activities, access to personal data and communications data (metadata) and any other interference with privacy are in full conformity with the Covenant, in particular article 17, including as regards the principles of legality, proportionality and necessity, and that State practice conforms thereto. It should, inter alia, ensure that (a) surveillance, collection of, access to and use of data and communications data are tailored to specific legitimate aims, are limited to a specific number of persons and are subject to judicial authorization; (b) effective and independent oversight mechanisms are in place to prevent arbitrary interference with privacy; and (c) affected persons have proper access to effective remedies in cases of abuse. The State party should also ensure biometric data protection guarantees, in accordance with article 17 of the Covenant.**

Treatment of prisoners

35. While noting the measures taken by the State party to address overcrowding and improve conditions of detention, including the refurbishment of existing prison facilities and the building of new ones and the establishment of the Directorate of Prisons to monitor prison conditions, the Committee remains concerned (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 17) about the persistence of severe overcrowding and inadequate living conditions in police detention centres and in prisons. It is also concerned about the 81 deaths in prison between 2012 and 2016 and regrets the lack of information on investigations into these deaths, which are, according to the State party, attributable to natural causes. It is further concerned that solitary confinement may be imposed as a disciplinary measure for up to 30 consecutive days under article 104 of Decree No. 14310 of 1949; the Committee notes in this connection the proposal to reduce the maximum length of solitary confinement to 15 days (arts. 6, 7 and 10).

36. **The State party should take effective measures to eliminate overcrowding in places of detention, including by increasing the use of non-custodial alternative measures to detention, and ensure that persons deprived of liberty are treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. To this end, it should redouble its efforts to improve conditions of detention, in accordance with the Covenant and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). It should also review the regulations governing solitary confinement, with a view to ensuring that it is applied only in the most exceptional circumstances and for strictly limited periods.**

Refugees and asylum seekers

37. The Committee acknowledges the significant contribution of the State party in hosting a large number of asylum seekers and refugees and its continuing engagement in providing assistance and protection to them, as well as the burden associated therewith. It also commends the State party for its commitment to the principle of non-refoulement and for not enforcing the deportation of Syrian nationals with expired legal status or without legal papers. However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The strict border admission regulations in place since January 2015, which have resulted in restricted access to asylum and pushbacks at the border with the Syrian Arab Republic that could amount to refoulement, and reports that asylum seekers and refugees originating from countries other than the Syrian Arab Republic are at risk of deportation or refoulement, in particular when there is no prospect of resettlement;

(b) Reports of the prolonged administrative detention of asylum seekers and refugees other than Syrian nationals, including that of children, without due process, and their expulsion;

(c) The broad discretionary powers granted to the General Security Office, pursuant to articles 17 and 18 of the 1962 Act on entry and exit, regarding decisions to detain without judicial warrant and deport individuals from Lebanon, and the lack of appeal procedures relating to such decisions;

(d) Reports of evictions, curfews and raids targeting in particular Syrian refugees;

(e) The limited coverage of the residency fee waiver policy (arts. 2, 7, 9, 13 and 24).

38. **The State party should:**

(a) **Ensure that the non-refoulement principle is strictly adhered to in practice, that all asylum seekers are protected against pushbacks at the border and that they have access to refugee status determination procedures;**

(b) **Bring its legislation and practices relating to the detention of asylum seekers and refugees into compliance with article 9 of the Covenant, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 35 (particularly para. 18);**

(c) **Provide for appeal procedures against decisions regarding detention and deportation;**

(d) **Ensure the effective protection of refugees against forced evictions;**

(e) **Ensure that curfews, if applied, are imposed only as a short-term and area-specific exceptional measure and are lawful and strictly justified under the Covenant, including under articles 9, 12 and 17;**

(f) **Expand the residency fee waiver to include refugees not currently covered.**

Migrant domestic workers

39. The Committee is concerned that migrant domestic workers are excluded from protection under domestic labour law and are subjected to abuse and exploitation under the sponsorship (*kafala*) system, including by the withholding of their identity documents, forced confinement, denial of time off, excessive work-hours, delayed payment or even non-payment, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and bonded labour-type situations, owing to exploitation by *shawishes*. It is also concerned about the lack of effective remedies against such abuses and about the risk of imprisonment or deportation faced by domestic migrant workers who sue their employers, given the restrictive visa system. The Committee is further concerned about reports of suicides and attempted suicides of domestic migrant workers in 2016, arbitrary arrests without access to counsel, and deportation, including of workers not residing with their employer and in retaliation for union activism. The Committee notes that the draft labour law would provide, inter alia, protection for domestic migrant workers against exploitation and abuse (arts. 2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 22 and 26).

40. **The State party should expand labour law protection to domestic workers; provide access to effective legal remedies for protection of domestic migrant workers' rights without fear of reprisal or deportation; abolish the sponsorship (*kafala*) system and reform recruitment practices with a view to ensuring respect for the rights of domestic workers and protection against exploitation and abuse; and step up measures aimed at raising awareness about domestic migrant workers' rights and existing avenues for their protection.**

Independence of the judiciary and the right to a fair trial

41. The Committee is concerned about the political pressure reportedly exerted on the judiciary, particularly in the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates, and about allegations that politicians use their influence to protect supporters from prosecution. It regrets the lack of comprehensive information on the procedures and criteria for the selection, appointment, promotion, suspension, disciplining and removal of judges and notes that bills aimed at ensuring the independence of the judiciary are currently under discussion (arts. 2 and 14).

42. **The State party should take all measures necessary to safeguard, in law and in practice, the full independence and impartiality of the judiciary, including by ensuring that the procedures for the selection, appointment, promotion, suspension, disciplining and removal of judges are in compliance with the principles of independence and impartiality, as set out in the Covenant. The State party should strengthen its efforts to guarantee that the judiciary can carry out its functions without any form of political interference.**

Military courts

43. The Committee remains concerned (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 14) about the broad jurisdiction of military courts that extends to civilians, including children. It is also concerned about: (a) the reported lack of independence and impartiality of military court judges; and (b) allegations of violations of fair trial guarantees and fundamental legal safeguards, including interrogation in the absence of a lawyer, torture and forced confessions, including from children, arbitrary sentences and a limited right of appeal against military court decisions. The Committee notes that three bills on the abolition of military courts are currently under discussion (arts. 2, 7, 9, 14 and 24).

44. **The State party should remove, without further delay, the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians. It should also: (a) ensure that pending trials of civilians before military courts take place under conditions that afford the full guarantees stipulated in article 14 of the Covenant and in the Committee's general comment No. 32 (2007) on the right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial; and (b) investigate all reported violations by military officials and provide victims with effective remedies.**

Freedom of expression

45. The Committee is concerned about: (a) the criminalization of defamation, insult, criticism of public officials and blasphemy, which can be punished with imprisonment; (b) allegations of extensive interpretation of the concept of cybercrime by the Cybercrime Centre of the Internal Security Forces aimed at restricting freedom of expression; (c) reports of the arrest and prosecution of individuals allegedly criticizing State authorities or political figures, including through social media; and (d) the broad and discretionary powers of censorship vested in the Directorate General of Public Security and the banning of a number of artistic products, including movies. The Committee is also concerned that the State party has failed to implement its previous recommendation (see CCPR/C/79/Add.78, para. 25) regarding the review of the Radio and Television Broadcasting Act No. 382 of 1994 and Decree No. 7997 of 1996 and the establishment of an independent broadcasting licensing authority (arts. 9 and 19).

46. **The State party should: (a) decriminalize blasphemy, insult and criticism of public officials; (b) consider the complete decriminalization of defamation and, in any case, countenance the application of criminal law only in the most serious cases, bearing in mind, as stated by the Committee in its general comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression, that imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty for defamation; (c) ensure that the concept of cybercrime is interpreted consistent with the freedom of expression; (d) refrain from suppressing the expression of dissenting opinions or censoring artistic expression beyond the narrow restrictions permitted under article 19 of the Covenant; and (e) review and amend the provisions of the Radio and Television Broadcasting Act No. 382/94 and Decree No. 7997/96 and**

establish an independent broadcasting licensing authority with the power to examine broadcasting applications and grant licences in accordance with reasonable and objective criteria.

Birth registration

47. The Committee is concerned about the complex procedure for birth registration, which involves high costs and onerous requirements for documentation, particularly in the case of the late birth registration of children over 1 year of age that entails application to both the religious and the civil courts (art. 12 of the 1951 Registration of Personal Status Act). While welcoming the waiver in September 2017 of the requirement for a person to have legal residence in order to register the birth of Syrian children born in Lebanon, and the exceptional authority granted to the Minister of the Interior in February 2018 to take all necessary measures to facilitate the late birth registration of Syrian nationals born in Lebanon after 2011, the Committee regrets that the legal and administrative framework remains unchanged for asylum seekers and refugees of other nationalities, foreigners, stateless persons and Lebanese nationals (arts. 2, 13, 16 and 24).

48. **The State party should reform the legal and administrative framework for civil registration in order to ensure the right of every child born in the territory of the State party to birth registration without discrimination, irrespective of the legal status of the parents, and to facilitate the enjoyment by children of their right to acquire a nationality. It should ensure that birth registration, particularly regular birth registration is free of charge and make the procedure for late birth registration accessible and affordable to anyone.**

D. Dissemination and follow-up

49. **The State party should widely disseminate the Covenant, its third periodic report, the written replies to the Committee's list of issues and the present concluding observations with a view to raising awareness of the rights enshrined in the Covenant among the judicial, legislative and administrative authorities, civil society and non-governmental organizations operating in the country, and the general public.**

50. **In accordance with rule 71, paragraph 5, of the Committee's rules of procedure, the State party is requested to provide, by 6 April 2020, information on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee in paragraphs 20 (violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence), 38 (refugees and asylum seekers) and 40 (migrant domestic workers) above.**

51. **The Committee requests the State party to submit its next periodic report by 6 April 2023 and to include in that report specific up-to-date information on the implementation of the recommendations made in the present concluding observations and of the Covenant as a whole. The Committee also requests the State party, in preparing the report, to broadly consult civil society and non-governmental organizations operating in the country. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/268, the word limit for the report is 21,200 words. Alternatively, the Committee invites the State party to agree, by 6 April 2019, to use its simplified reporting procedure, whereby the Committee transmits a list of issues to the State party prior to the submission of its report. The State party's replies to that list of issues will constitute the next periodic report to be submitted under article 40 of the Covenant.**